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Understanding the Drivers of Migration to Europe: Lessons from Afghanistan for the Current Refugee Crisis

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Executive Summary

With record numbers of refugees arriving in Europe in 2015, the crisis facing European Union states has put pressure on policymakers to devise effective policy options that address both the plight of refugees and the concerns of EU citizens who feel overwhelmed by recent inflows.

The European Council has placed migration at the top of the EU's agenda, with efforts designed to help frontline member states with identification and asylum processes and control of the EU's external borders; naval operations in the Mediterranean; temporary and emergency-driven relocation mechanism within the EU; and cooperation with source and transit countries through financial, technical and development assistance. Yet, the outcomes have been unsuccessful. Many argue that these actions fail to address the root causes driving people to seek safety in Europe. A complex network of push and pull factors explain why so many have left everything to seek safety within the EU.

To avoid hasty policy responses for better management of migration, it is important to understand what has and has not worked in the past. Examining other major countries of origin for refugees in Europe, in particular Afghanistan, can provide useful guidelines for current policy.

Syria, the current number one source country of refugees globally, has received humanitarian assistance from Europe with continued pledges of a multibillion-euro package from the EU in early 2016. Likewise Afghanistan received over €2.5 billion in EU assistance alone between 2002 and 2013. It also receives funding under EU regional programmes for Asia, in particular Aid for Uprooted People, as well as number of other thematic funding instruments.¹

However, this assistance has not stemmed the flow of refugees, with hundreds of thousands of Afghans continuing to flee their country for safety abroad, including in Europe. An estimated 550,000 Afghans are projected to seek refugee status in Europe by 2018.² Recently, some Western embassies in Kabul, such as the German embassy, have launched information campaigns to dissuade Afghans from leaving their homeland.

Are there lessons for European policymakers from the intervention in Afghanistan since 2001? How are information campaigns working in an environment where migrants have access to extensive communication technology? This research looks at the case of Afghanistan as a 'lessons learned' example and highlights where European efforts to tackle the refugee crisis could be improved. The conclusions are relevant for Syria and other countries in which the EU has humanitarian engagement and from where refugees in Europe originate.

1 - Delegation of the EU to Afghanistan.

2 - KPSRL (2016).



1. Introduction

Current levels of migration are at unprecedented levels. According to International Organization for Migration (IOM), there were 244 million migrants—individuals residing in a country other than that of their birth—around the world in 2015 (IOM, 2015). UN migration data (UN, 2015) demonstrates that the majority of global migration takes place between countries that are in the same geographic region. Around 67% of international migrants reside in just twenty countries. The United States is the largest host of international migrants with 47 million people (UN, 2015).

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), there are 1.8 billion people in the world today aged between 10 and 24, of which 89% live in developing countries. In 17 developing countries, half of the population is under the age of 18 (UN, 2015). These global demographic trends, in particular the youth bulge in developing countries, along with widespread aspirations for better economic conditions, are likely to encourage continued growth in worldwide mobility for the foreseeable future (UN, 2015).

Urbanisation and the increasing significance of global cities as centres of economic prosperity has also affected migration flows. According to the IOM's World Migration Report 2015, almost 20% of migrants live in the world's 20 largest cities. International migrants form over a third of the total population in cities such as Sydney, Auckland, Singapore and London (IOM, 2015). At least one in four residents in Amsterdam, Frankfurt and Paris is foreign-born (IOM, 2015).

Climate change could contribute to displacement and movement of people, particularly if it correlates with conflict and/or economic insecurity.³ Some experts predict that parts of the Middle East and North Africa will be uninhabitable because of temperature increases by the end of century (Bailey & Green, 2016). However, further research and analysis is required to study the links between climate change and migration.

A significant proportion of migrants are refugees who seek protection abroad because of insecurity and fear of persecution in their home country. There are currently around 40 active conflicts in the world⁴ with varying degrees of severity. In addition to causing humanitarian emergencies and widespread destruction, these conflicts resulted in 65.3 million internally displaced people (IDPs) and 24.5 million refugees in 2015.⁵ According to the UNHCR⁶, a majority of the global refugee population came from just three countries: Syria (4.9 million), Afghanistan (2.7 million) and Somalia (1.1 million).

3 - For more details see: Bailey, R. & Green, G. (2016, May 5). Should Europe be concerned about climate refugees? *Newsweek*. Retrieved from <https://www.europe.newsweek.com/should-europe-be-concerned-about-climate-refugees-460661?rm=eu>.

4 - IISS, Armed Conflict Database.

5 - For a thorough look at statistics, see UNHCR's 'Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2015'.

6 - For detailed breakdown of figures on global refugee population, see UNCHR's 'Figures at a Glance', retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html>.



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Many of these people seek safety and better lives in Europe, although the number of refugees and asylum seekers coming to Europe comprises only a small percentage of the total global refugee population and is dwarfed by intra-EU movements—15 million EU citizens currently work in another member state (The Parliament Magazine, 2016). But numbers of refugees coming to Europe are unprecedented. More than a million migrants and refugees crossed the Mediterranean by boat in 2015 compared to 216,000 in 2014 (UNHCR, Information Portal). Numbers are likely to remain high until conflicts and crises in the Middle East, and other regions, subside.

The impact of Europe's refugee crisis has been felt markedly, though unevenly, across the EU. It has placed additional strains on frontline member states already facing economic difficulties since 2008. The rise in support for radical right-wing parties and recent terrorist attacks in France, Belgium and Germany have heightened anti-immigration sentiment among people fearful of the potential for violent extremists to arrive in Europe posing as refugees and asylum seekers. Conversely, there is public pressure on the EU and its member states to prevent fatalities among refugees seeking to cross the Mediterranean. At least 3,770 migrants drowned attempting to enter Europe in 2015 (IOM, Missing Migrants Project).

There is an urgent need for European countries to adopt an effective medium to long-term approach that combines emergency relief and crisis management, with economic development, capacity building and stability in countries affected by conflict and insecurity.

This study looks at the case of Afghanistan as a 'lessons learned' example and highlights where European efforts to tackle the crisis could be improved. The conclusions are relevant for Syria and other countries in which the EU has humanitarian engagement and from where refugees in Europe originate.

2. Afghanistan

2.1 Context: A History of Forced Migration

Located at the periphery of Central Asia, South Asia and the Middle East, Afghanistan is a landlocked country with an estimated population of 32 million people (The World Factbook, 2016). In 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and installed a communist government. This led to a countrywide rebellion by the so-called *Mujahideen* who declared Jihad against the Soviet troops and the government. US support for the Mujahideen made Afghanistan central to the Cold War. The war affected almost all of Afghanistan and led to the deaths of around 1.5 million Afghans (Khalidi, 1991). The Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989 and the communist regime fell in 1992, and the Mujahideen factions took over Afghanistan (BBC, Afghanistan country profile). A brutal civil war ensued until 1996 when the Taliban took power in Kabul and most of the country.

The post-1979 waves of migration from Afghanistan represent one of the world's largest and most protracted refugee situations, the largest volume of returnees in recent history and large-



scale internal displacement (Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey, 2014). The number of refugees reached a staggering 6.2 million in February 1989 almost all of whom were in Pakistan and Iran (UNHCR, 1999). The collapse of the communist regime in 1992 triggered a brief period of confidence and large-scale return of refugees, as many thought the war was over. Around 1.6 million refugees returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan and Iran in 1992 and a further 1 million in 1993 (UNHCR, 1999). For many this seemed to be the end of their absence from their 'homeland'; for their children born in refugee camps it was the first visit to a country they had never seen. However, the eruption of the civil war ended this trend. Horrendous human rights abuses and mass destruction of infrastructure took place, notably in Kabul. By the late 1990s, the numbers of Afghan returnees fell significantly, and millions of Afghan refugees continued to live in Pakistan and Iran because of widespread violence in Afghanistan.

The issue of Afghan migration has been historically viewed as an issue for Afghanistan's neighbourhood but this has changed with the current refugee crisis in Europe. Since October 2001, after the removal of the Taliban regime by a US-led international military coalition, Afghanistan has received considerable financial, political and military support from Western donor governments including the EU and its member states. Nevertheless, the desired stability and construction of a viable state in Afghanistan to remedy the traumas of perpetual conflict have not been achieved. A vicious Taliban insurgency and the re-emergence of international terrorist groups (such as the so-called Islamic State and Al-Qaeda), and subsequent security problems have caused internal and external displacement.

The reasons pushing people to leave their country to seek refuge in Europe are complex and reflect a combination of interconnected factors that directly impact everyday life and erode confidence in a safe future within their home countries. Research and fieldwork in Afghanistan for this essay⁷ suggests that the main causes of migration include: security concerns, economic difficulties, corruption, a crisis of confidence in national and international authorities and a lack of optimism about Afghanistan's future. The legal and political distinction between refugees and economic migrants is not seen in such clear-cut terms by those leaving Afghanistan.

2.2 Conflict-driven Displacement

Violence is understood as the key factor encouraging Afghans to leave their country and seek refuge in Europe. Rising insecurity following the emergence of ISIS and the Taliban's territorial gains across several provinces in Afghanistan, coupled with economic hardship have led an increasing number of Afghans to leave Afghanistan. A 2009 study led by Oxfam in collaboration with a number

7 - This study builds on field research that the author undertook in Kabul between April and June 2016, and a number of conversations with Afghans at the different stages of their journey to Europe. Combined with the fieldwork, the author has conducted semi-structured interviews with Afghans respondents, experts, NGO staff working with Afghan refugees and Afghan government officials. Although the interviews are not a comprehensive representation of push factors behind Afghans' decision to leave their country, they are helpful in understanding local perspectives among potential refugees on a number of important questions about their decision to leave and their perceptions about the asylum system in Europe.



of NGOs in Afghanistan explored individual experiences of conflict since 1978. The study concluded that 76% of respondents had been forced to leave their homes at some point. Of these, 41% were internally displaced, 42% were externally displaced and 17% had been both internally and externally displaced (Oxfam, 2009). Many individuals were displaced multiple times. The report suggests that migration has become a survival strategy for most Afghans: 17% of Afghans stated that they were thinking of leaving the country (Oxfam, 2009). Given deteriorating security since 2009, these figures are likely to have risen.

2.3 Searching for Economic Opportunities and Livelihoods

For many Afghans, heightened insecurity combined with a lack of employment opportunities and access to education drives them to leave. But the decision to 'leave' is also affected by pull factors.

Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world, with almost 40% of the population below the poverty line (World Bank, Afghanistan Country Data). It is one of the most developmentally challenged countries in the world (NORAD, 2012) and is heavily dependent on foreign aid. Between 2010 and 2011, its aid dependency rate was 71%,⁸ (NORAD, 2012) among the highest in the world: external aid was responsible for 85% of the national budget, the entire national development budget, and 45% of the operating budget (NORAD, 2012). This reliance on aid has led to a boom and bust situation. The withdrawal of most Western troops in 2014 had a severe economic impact on Afghans. Afghanistan's GDP growth fell from an average of 11.5% in 2007-12 to just 1.5% in 2013-15 and 0.8% in 2015 (IMF, 2016). Although the International Monetary Fund projects a slight growth of 2% for 2016 (IMF, 2016), economic growth remains below the level needed to ensure increased employment and better living standards.

Furthermore, a noticeable failure of the development intervention in Afghanistan since 2001 has been the absence of major infrastructure projects with the potential to turn around the future prospects of Afghans' livelihood, such as building electricity dams and industrial parks.

2.4 Access to Information and Networks in the 21st century

Legal immigration to many Western states is difficult. Many migrants choose irregular migration or use people smugglers to migrate to the West. New technology can facilitate this: knowledge of clandestine routes and individual experiences can be shared among friends and families. But alongside this the proliferation of smugglers' networks has heightened the dangers faced by migrants and exposed them to greater risk along the way, particularly through sea journeys on overcrowded boats. Migrants from the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa have used their phones to call the Italian coast-guard for help as they embark on journeys from Libya to Sicily, although in 2015, 2,900 migrants still drowned out of a total of 153,000 who attempted crossing into Europe using the Libya-Sicily route.

⁸ - NORAD defines 'aid dependency rate/ratio' as net official aid divided by gross national income.



With the boom in the technology sector, particularly the advent of smart phones and of communication ‘apps’ such as *Whatsapp* and *Skype*, potential migrants and refugees are connected to the communities of information like never before. In addition, the expanding numbers of Middle Eastern, Asian, and African diasporas population in Europe also attract further migration. The presence of relatives and friends in EU countries reduces the costs and risks of migration and exerts a significant pull effect (Lehne, 2016).

It is difficult to measure the specific impact of access to mobile phones, GPS devices and digital maps on migrants attempting to reach Europe, but it is clear that technology is increasingly important in determining the course of journeys for migrants. Writing for the UNFPA, anthropologist Altamirano maintains that the current wave of international and national migration is occurring in the context of a ‘fourth globalisation’ (Altamirano, 2010) shaped by a network of links, dependencies and interdependencies ‘mediated by digital technology’ (Altamirano, 2010). This has led to the emergence of ‘transnational families’ and ‘transnational communities’ where family and friends can be in daily contact via the internet (often accessed via mobile phones) (Altamirano, 2010).

3. Transit Countries

3.1 The Constraints of Regional Migration

Refugees also choose to travel to Europe because of conditions in neighbouring countries, particularly economic and social deprivation, restricted freedom of movement, lack of integration and employment opportunities and because of the expectation that conditions in their home country will not improve in the foreseeable future.

Afghan refugees have expressed anger at the ill-treatment inflicted upon them by authorities — and in some cases ordinary citizens — in Iran and Pakistan. The forced deportation of Afghans from Pakistan in recent months and the confiscation of their property and businesses by Pakistani authorities, demonstrates their lack of legal rights. Most Afghans also accept that they have no clear path to citizenship or permanent residence in either country, leaving them vulnerable to deportation, even after having lived there for several years. In consequence, they are less interested in settling in Pakistan or Iran (Hakimi & Haymon, 2016).

Other countries in Afghanistan’s neighbourhood such as the Gulf States, India, Turkey and countries in Central Asia offer Afghans virtually no routes to legal migration (Hakimi & Haymon, 2016). This lack of alternative options has led many Afghan refugees to seek citizenship and permanent residency in the West, notably Europe.

3.2 Limited Donor Capacity in Iran and Pakistan

Since 1989, international (including European) donors have largely engaged with Afghan refu-



gees in Iran and Pakistan through the state institutions in these two countries. On the whole, Afghan refugees have been excluded from donor decision-making.

European donors have limited scope to assess the impact of their aid to Afghan refugees in Iran or Pakistan. In Pakistan, movement of Western embassy staff is restricted because of insecurity. Iran has been largely uncooperative and prevents regular access to refugee populations. Consequently, donors have to rely on data and information passed to them by the host states.

4. EU Policy Responses

The EU and its member states have pursued a number of different policy responses in order to limit the number of refugees forced to leave the country or deter those who may seek irregular travel to Europe, but with limited success.

4.1 The European Migration Agenda

In May 2015, the European Commission adopted the European Migration Agenda: an EU-wide response building on the range of financial, development, technical and diplomatic tools at the EU's disposal (European Commission, 2015). It identified six priorities for EU action:

- raising emergency funds for frontline member states, along with unlocking new funds for the UNHCR and international NGOs;
- strengthening European and national maritime operations, primarily in the Mediterranean;
- supporting European agencies responsible for monitoring the EU's external borders;
- looking into civilian and military missions to address smugglers' networks;
- establishing a relocation mechanism within the EU;
- and improving the relocation mechanism in place for refugees located in camps in neighbouring countries.

While these political, financial and legal instruments have helped frontline member states and neighbouring countries to deal with refugee and asylum claims, they have tended to focus on emergency relief and registration processes, rather than address the root causes behind the refugee crisis. For instance, forced deportation—or 'voluntary return'—of Afghans whose asylum applications have been rejected within the EU is an operational effort that has no bearing on the push factors in Afghanistan. It does not help the rehabilitation (re-integration) of deportees into Afghan society or reduce the chances of them making the journey back to Europe.

Another significant hurdle to devising medium- and long-term policy agendas is the lack of knowledge and analytical capacity on migration issues within European embassies in source countries of migration. A key reason for such lack of capacity is the short-term deployment of diplomats to conflict zones. In Afghanistan Western embassies rely on consultants to conduct surveys, undertake research and produce policy advice on key issues, including on migration. In many cases, such



efforts are driven by project-based priorities rather than long-term trends or policy considerations. This could be mitigated by employing qualified nationals of countries. In addition, support for local think-tanks, universities and experts to assist in research and policy advice can be useful in several ways. For instance, local institutions produce outputs in local languages in addition to English; national experts do not have to deal with the challenges of short-term deployments and restriction on movement, something that international consultants are faced with in conflict zones.

4.2 Development and Humanitarian Assistance

Humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan is a key cornerstone of international engagement. Since 2001, Afghanistan has received extensive direct international development assistance and has been at the centre of international military engagement and state-building efforts. Representing EU's efforts, the Delegation of the European Union to Afghanistan is responsible for managing the current spending pledge of €1.4 billion on development interventions (Delegation of the EU to Afghanistan).

The staggering flow of international support to Afghanistan since 2001 has had some transformative effects on the country. It has a new constitution and has acquired membership of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Prior to 2001 it had no access to media except for the Taliban's radio and newspaper. It now enjoys over 40 television channels, has access to the Internet and has more than 20 million mobile phone users. Prior to October 2001, there were fewer than one million school students (almost all male) in Afghanistan; today the number of school students in the country is 9 million of which 3.6 million are girls (The New Afghanistan, 2016).

By June 2016, the United States alone had appropriated nearly \$115 billion for relief and reconstruction of Afghanistan since the beginning of financial year in 2002, only \$68.5 billion of this was allocated to the security sector, the remainder consisting of funds for governance and development, humanitarian aid, and civilian operations (SIGAR, 2016). This is a staggering amount of money to be spent on one of the poorest and most underdeveloped nations on earth.

While the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) provides detailed data on US funds to Afghanistan, including comprehensive scrutiny of individual US-funded projects, it has been difficult to generate comparable detailed estimates for the total contribution by EU states since 2001.

Nonetheless, foreign aid and development assistance to Afghanistan has failed on many levels. It has led to chronic aid dependency, removing the need for Afghan state institutions to generate revenue or develop capacity for outcomes-based performance. The inflow of billions of dollars into a country where national institutions virtually did not exist prior to 2001, and where existing institutions were too weak to absorb foreign funds, have led to the emergence of rampant and deep-rooted corruption at all levels of governance and everyday life. Transparency International consistently ranks Afghanistan as the third most corrupt country in the world (Transparency International, 2015)—only scoring better than North Korea and Somalia. Aid dependency, corruption, poor infrastructure and



the repercussions of the 2008 global financial crisis have stifled employment. In addition to insecurity, this has compelled many Afghans to leave the country in search of new opportunities.⁹

Another criticism of international aid and development in Afghanistan is the militarisation of aid by the US-led international community, including European countries, which has resulted in a catastrophic imbalance between civilian and military efforts.¹⁰ Through its counter-insurgency (COIN) doctrine, the US military worked alongside the State Department and USAID representatives to establish the rule of law and improve the economy, infrastructure and governance (Keating & Stapleton, 2015). However, the lack of coordination on the civilian front has led to the emergence of a 'de facto military lead' (Keating & Stapleton, 2015), reflecting the perplexing dynamics of international assistance to Afghanistan and the absence of a political strategy for medium to long-term sustainability, and the lack of assessments on the impact of development interventions. This approach led to a blurring of lines- between the nature and purpose of aid to Afghans and the role of those who delivered aid on the ground. Apart from creating a confusing and multi-layered line of reporting for civilian aid workers, it made it difficult to assess the impact of the assistance provided. Militarisation of aid also made Afghan civilians a target of Taliban attacks as the insurgents accused them of colluding with foreign military missions. This has, in turn, alienated individuals and communities from accessing and benefiting from humanitarian assistance in many parts of Afghanistan or led to international aid being delivered in areas where no prior needs assessments were undertaken.

4.3 Information Campaigns

Recently, some Western governments have launched information campaigns to deter potential migrants from leaving Afghanistan. These campaigns portray a negative image of the journey involved, highlighting the difficulties of integration and challenging social and economic conditions, such as the lack of housing, in the West.¹¹

Information campaigns reflect a desire for greater control over migration in Europe and a general feeling of 'helplessness' in the face of persistent flows of people (Nieuwenhuys & Pecoud, 2007) with a basic aim to reduce emigration in the first place (Nieuwenhuys & Pecoud, 2007). But they 'rely on the questionable assumption' that information plays a key role in migration decisions (Nieu-

9 - Interviews with Afghan migrants underlined a sense of pessimism among respondents at what they see as dismal consequences of international financial assistance to Afghanistan after the collapse of the Taliban regime in 2001, in particular the corrupt elite that emerged at the back of large-scale foreign aid.

10 - For detailed analysis of approaches to military and civilian assistance see: Keating, M. & Stapleton, B. J. (2015, July). Military and Civilian Assistance to Afghanistan 2001 – 14: An Incoherent Approach. Chatham House Briefing Paper. Retrieved from https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field_document/20150722MilitaryCivilianAssistanceAfghanistanStapletonKeating.pdf.

11 - For instance the German government has translated into Dari/Persian (aimed at Iranian and Afghan migrants) a media report on challenges of settling into a new life in Germany: <http://www.ardmediathek.de/tv/Reportage-Dokumentation/Willkommen-in-der-Wirklichkeit-persisch/NDR-Fernsehen/Video?bcastId=799280&documentId=33903792>.



wenhuis & Pecoud, 2007)—and that other sources of information (e.g. social media, personal and family contacts) are less influential than messages conveyed on billboards by Western governments. Figures 1 and 2 are samples of the campaign by the German government in Afghanistan. According to the German Embassy in Kabul, these billboards are installed in 18 locations across Kabul city.

However, the campaigns have had limited results. European diplomats acknowledge¹² that billboards have little impact given that more than half the population is illiterate and where mistrust of information from official channels is high. Information campaigns may affect refugees' choice of final destination to the extent that such a choice exists but are unlikely to have an influence over the decision to leave the home country.

Figure 1. Sample of a billboard funded by the German Embassy. The text in Pashto and Dari languages reads: 'Leaving Afghanistan! Have you thought about it carefully?'

✕

#RumoursAboutGermany - Public awareness campaign in Afghanistan

1 2

Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany - د کابل د آلمان د فدرالي جمهوریت د سفارت
Kabul

افغانستان را ترک میکنید!
آیا در این مورد دقیق فکر کرده اید؟

د افغانستانه وتل!
آیا په دې هکله مو ښه فکر کړی؟

#RumoursAboutGermany
www.RumoursAboutGermany.info

(© Federal Foreign Office)

Billboards in the local languages Dari and Pashto

12 - This is based on the fieldwork in Kabul.



Figure 2. Sample of a public awareness message on the website of German Embassy

The screenshot shows the website of the German Embassy in Kabul. The header includes navigation links for 'Deutsch', 'دري', 'Home', 'Site map', and 'Contact'. The main heading is 'German Embassy Kabul'. Below this, there is a breadcrumb trail: 'Home > Foreign and European Policy > Refugee Policy > Public awareness campaign > #RumoursAboutGermany > Welcome payment?'. The main content area features the title 'Welcome payment?' and the hashtag '#RumoursAboutGermany'. The English text states: 'Contrary to rumours and misinformation deliberately spread by human traffickers, Germany does not provide a welcome payment. By spreading such lies, human traffickers knowingly put people's lives in danger.' Below this, there is a section in Dari: 'پول خوش آمدید؟ آلمان آنچنانیکه در آوازه ها و معلومات نادرست قاچاقبران قصداً ادعا می شود، برای مهاجرین پول خوش آمدید نمی پردازد. قاچاقبران با پخش این افتراها آگاهانه زندگی انسانها را به مخاطره می اندازند.' Another section in Dari asks 'د هرکلي پيسی؟ آلمان د اوازو او د قاچاقبرانو د غلطو معلوماتو د عمدی ادعاوو پر خلاف مهاجرینو ته د هرکلي پيسی نه ورکوي. قاچاقبران ددغو درواغو معلوماتو په خپرولو سره د انسانانو ژوند په آگاهانه توگه په خطر کې اچوي.'

Finally, by associating undocumented migration with human trafficking, these campaigns display moral and political ambiguities (Nieuwenhuys & Pecoud, 2007). The basic narrative of information campaigns aimed at discouraging migration emphasize that potential migrants will not migrate if they are made aware of the risks of travelling outside 'regularised channels' (e.g. with a smuggler) (Oeppen, 2016). This is, at the very least, hyperbole, as numerous evidence based analyses¹³ and research show that the decision to 'leave' is significantly more complex. Over recent years, these campaigns have become the subject of increasing criticism on moral grounds (Oeppen, 2016).

4.4 Challenges of Data for Policymakers

In a conflict driven environment such as Afghanistan, lack of data is one of the major hurdles to providing a comprehensive analysis. Although there is a wealth of abundant studies and analyses regarding Afghan migration, problems include the lack of census data, difficulties in conducting grassroots research, lack of mechanisms to trace movements and the absence of efficient capacity

13 - For instance see Hakimi & Haymon (2016), and Schmeidl (2014).



within national and international institutions. This has led to over-reliance on a narrow set of sources of generic data and statistics.¹⁴

Little attention has been paid to supporting capacity building and providing resources to local organisations who can play a pivotal role in generating data, producing statistics and undertaking research/analysis on complex trends.

5. Relevance of Afghanistan for the Crisis in Syria

Syria was a largely peaceful, though highly authoritarian, country until the uprising of 2011. Since the turmoil began in 2011, UN officials in Syria estimate that 400,000 people have been killed, while Syrian research groups believe this figure is at least 470,000 (Foreign Policy, 2016). The conflict in Syria is the world's largest humanitarian crisis since World War II (Foreign Policy, 2016). The war has resulted in rising humanitarian needs, increasing levels of population displacement, and has exposed an entire generation of children to violence; Syrians are deprived of basic services, education and protection. This was unimaginable in 2011 when the civic protests against the Assad regime initially began.

In 2011 European states, as well as the US, were quick to call for the country's president, Bashar Al Assad, to step down, and several of them recognised an opposition coalition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people; the EU as a collective recognised the Syrian National Coalition as the 'legitimate representative of the aspirations of the Syrian people' in November 2012 (Council of the EU, 2012). While the various European steps to support the opposition were taken in a context where the opposition was facing severe and violent repression, the provision of arms, aid and political support to the opposition can also be seen as having contributed to the conflict.

5.1 Development Aid and Humanitarian Assistance for Syria

Today, the vast majority of Syrian refugees are staying in the neighbouring states: 2.7 million are registered in Turkey, and 2.1 million in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon.¹⁵ Various European countries, including the UK, have emphasised the view that it is best for refugees to stay as close to home as possible, and have focused their response on providing aid to the host countries. However, the sheer numbers are problematic for regional host countries, some of which have considerably small citizen populations. For instance, the 1.1 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon now make up around 1 in 5 residents¹⁶ although Lebanon has suspended new registrations of Syrian refugees since 2015. Jordan and Lebanon already host large populations of Palestinian refugees, and, in

14 - UNHCR is the usual portal for looking at the data on Afghan migrations. However, it is difficult to verify data provided by Pakistani and Iranian authorities on the number of Afghan refugees in those countries; lack of validating such data also means we do not know exactly how much of the international aid aimed at Afghan refugees reach the intended recipients through Pakistani and Iranian governments.

15 - UNHCR, Figures at a glance.

16 - UNHCR, Figures at a glance.



Jordan's case, Iraqi refugees too. There is a widespread perception in these countries that they are dealing with refugee crises that result, at least in part, from Western policy failures, including the invasion of Iraq and the lack of any resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict decades after the British withdrawal from what was then the Palestine Mandate.

Furthermore, most Arab countries have never ratified the international conventions on the status of refugees. This is because the conventions emerged shortly after the Palestinian refugee crisis began and Arab countries feared that accepting this framework would preclude Palestinians from ever going home. As of May 2015, the EU and its member states had mobilised more than €5 billion for relief and recovery aid to Syria (European Commission, 2016). This is in addition to €3 billion pledged at the 'Supporting Syria' conference held in London in February 2016.

Since the Syrian refugee crisis unfolded, there has been mounting criticism of the wealthy Gulf countries for not taking in Syrian refugees, because these countries do not recognise 'refugeehood'; not least because of their unique demographic models, where migrants with no prospect of becoming citizens are the majority in most of the Gulf states, and governments do not want to open doors to permanent residence for non-citizens (Kinninmont, 2015). However, the monetary contribution from some Gulf States towards international relief efforts for Syrian refugees has been significant. Kuwait has pledged \$800 million through the UN for Syrian crisis since 2012 while United Arab Emirates has given \$364 million (Kinninmont, 2015). These contributions are lower than assistance from the UK and the US but are considerably higher as a proportion of GDP.

It is not inconceivable that international donors will have direct access for development and humanitarian interventions if the situation in Syria improves in the foreseeable future. The lessons from Afghanistan, and other relevant cases, should provide guiding principles to ensure aid effectiveness in Syria.

5.2 Changing Attitudes in EU towards Refugees from Syria

According to Eurobarometer polling, the public now regard immigration as the most important issue facing the EU (European Commission, 2016). Arguably, the most profound manifestation of this heightened fear of immigration came about in the result of the UK's referendum on membership of the EU where the vote in favour of 'Brexit' was driven in particular by concern about high levels of immigration.¹⁷ In public and press debates, distinctions between the free movement of EU citizens and other forms of immigration to the UK became blurred. In addition, some countries that have traditionally been seen as relatively welcoming to refugees have adopted harsh policies: in Denmark a law was passed allowing police to seize refugees' personal possessions if these exceed 10,000 kroner in value (*The Independent*, 2016).

17 - For example, see Goodwin, M. & Milazzo, C. (2015, November). Britain, the European Union, and the Referendum: What drives Euroscepticism? *Chatham House*. Retrieved from <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/research/20151209EuroscepticismGoodwinMilazzo.pdf>.



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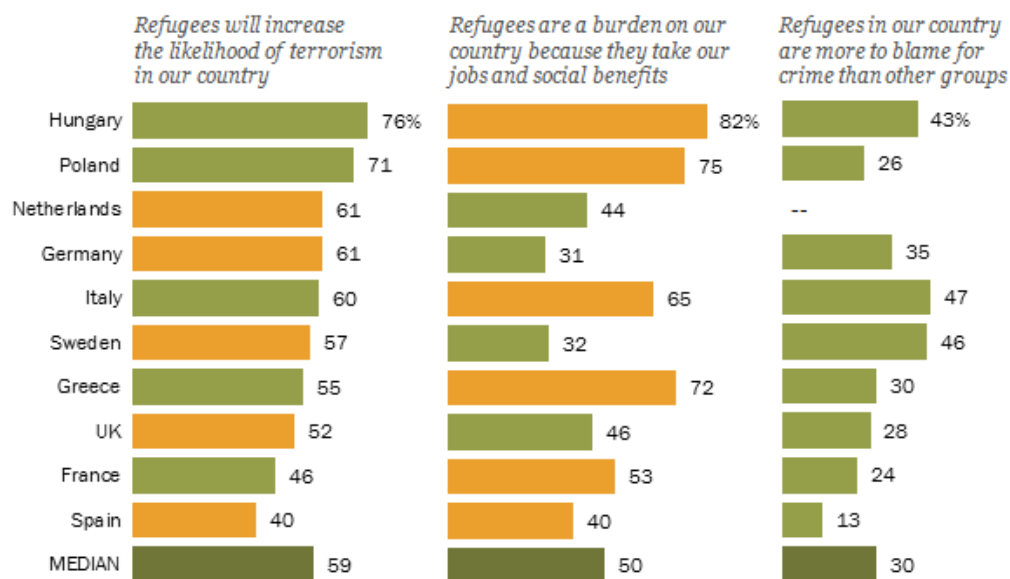
As with any crisis, the influx of refugees into Europe in 2015 contained its own ingredients of uncertainty. Germany's initially warm reception of refugees created an almost euphoric atmosphere among tens of thousands of migrants from Syria who were on the move towards, or within, Europe's borders. However, as the numbers of refugees and migrants swelled, particularly in countries of first arrival, the resources and infrastructure – as well as public attitudes – were severely tested.

From erecting fences (such as in Hungary) and resurrecting border controls, to the talk of a break-up of Schengen area, the attitudes towards refugees in Europe are hardening. A survey by the Pew Research Center in July 2016 confirmed these views (see Figure 3).

Figure 3.

Many Europeans concerned with security, economic repercussions of refugee crisis

■ Top choice



Note: Netherlands excluded on question about crime (Q51b) due to administrative error.

Source: Spring 2016 Global Attitudes Survey. Q51a-c.

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In response to hardening views on immigration in general, and against the influx of refugees in particular, EU policymakers have struggled to take effective steps towards initiating new policies that could calm public anxiety in EU countries.

Nevertheless, one initiative that gained significant attention is the so-called EU-Turkey deal under which the EU can return migrants back to Turkey who arrive in Greece through the Mediterranean if they fail to claim asylum upon arrival or have their asylum claim refused (European Council, 2016). The incentives pledged to Turkey in return for the deal included generous humanitarian as-



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sistance for Syrian refugees in Turkey, loosening travel restrictions for Turkish citizens to the EU and potentially making progress on talks for Turkey's accession into EU.

However, the recent political turmoil in Turkey, the failed coup in July 2016 and increasing frequency of terrorist attacks in Turkey have made cooperation with Europe on refugee issues a secondary matter for the Turkish government. As of late August 2016, Turkey and EU policymakers were at odds over money. Despite Brussels' emphasis that €2.1 billion have been 'mobilised' to help Syrian refugees in Turkey, only €105 million have actually been handed to the aid agencies on the ground (*The Guardian*, 2016). The plan to bring refugees to Europe from Turkey has also made little progress: only 1,085 Syrians in Turkey have been resettled in EU countries, despite initial talk of 72,000 places (*The Guardian*, 2016).

Faced with the blunt realities of an influx of refugees, public confidence and unity among member states fundamentally depend on the implementation of workable policies and the pursuit of effective strategies to deal with the crisis. In this regard, it is important for the EU to make initiatives such as the EU-Turkey pact a success.

6. Conclusion

The current refugee crisis is one of the most formidable policy challenges that the European Union has faced. It is highly likely that the number of refugees arriving in Europe will remain high in the foreseeable future, possibly for years. The greater mobility of people globally and the turmoil in major source countries for refugees in Europe are credible indicators of this upward trend. Furthermore, the demographic dynamics in Africa, predicted to experience a doubling of its population by 2050 (Lehne, 2016), combined with the socioeconomic and security challenges facing many African nations could also lead to substantial flows of refugees and migrants to Europe.

European policymakers have a number of potential policy options in front of them that might help in addressing the current refugee crisis and future flows into Europe. This study has focused on two specific elements that concern external aspects of policies on managing migration, namely development and humanitarian assistance, and the role of information campaigns in tackling the flow of refugees into Europe.

The implementation and impact of these approaches in Afghanistan, as one of the primary source countries for refugees globally for almost four decades, provides examples of lessons to be learned in the approach to other countries such as Syria which will continue to be a focus of humanitarian aid and development support for the foreseeable future.

6.1 Humanitarian/Development Assistance

In Afghanistan, the initial enthusiasm of the international donor gave way to fatigue, as development assistance contributed to growing levels of corruption and the mismanagement of aid by the poorly-equipped Afghan government eroded donor confidence. International donors bear



their share of responsibility for failing to yield greater dividends from development support in Afghanistan: a lack of coordination, ignoring a needs-based approach, limited understanding of the local context, and attempts at militarization and securitization of aid collectively undermined international donors' efforts in Afghanistan. Priorities were often defined in the capitals of donor countries rather than in light of realities on the ground in Afghanistan. This process quickly disenfranchised Afghan government institutions from proactive participation in decision-making and further alienated Afghans.

Moreover, the abundance of aid money for Afghanistan from early to mid-2000s, often provided without effective conditionality, prepared a fertile ground for corruption. Understanding societal dynamics and networks of elite nepotism can shield aid money from misuse on the ground. Correspondingly, it is possible for donor agencies to achieve the desired results by building collaborative partnerships with indigenous local groups who may not necessarily possess sophisticated communication skills but are able to support needs-based delivery of aid and development assistance.

Many Afghans point to a lack of basic industry and infrastructure as one of the main reasons they are not optimistic about the future. Independent reports have pointed out that fraud and waste were rampant among both Afghan and international private contractors who were tasked with repairing the infrastructure in Afghanistan (Lutz & Desai, 2015). Given the destruction created by the current conflict, Syria will need considerable assistance for reconstruction. Building infrastructure does not only yield economic benefits, it also helps rebuild optimism among ordinary citizens about their future after the traumas of war.

The absence of consistent, reliable and systematic data on the overall expenditure by international donor community in Afghanistan poses serious challenges for accountability, analytical capacity and good decision making processes. The plethora of donor agencies, and government organisations, that were at the forefront of funding projects in Afghanistan particularly between 2001 and 2014 have left no trace of effectual data for their Afghan government counterparts to help them in decision making or capacity building. For the EU, it should be a top priority to harmonise data on development and humanitarian expenditure and effectiveness in Syria.

6.2 Information Campaigns: Key Lessons from Afghanistan

Efforts by some EU states to curb the number of Afghan refugees arriving in Europe through information campaigns have not been effective. They rely on the erroneous assumption that a message from a Western government will change a potential migrant's decision, amid compelling factors pushing people to leave. Information campaigns are little more than symbolic efforts by European governments with limited tools to control outflows.

The growth of people-smuggling networks into a vast, lucrative, and sophisticated industry will make illegal migration an even more formidable problem. Instead of asking the fundamental question of why smugglers' networks thrive in countries like Afghanistan, and in transit countries such as Turkey and Jordan, the European government agencies who are responsible for information campaigns



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fail to acknowledge and address the lack of regularized legal routes for people from countries like Afghanistan, Syria and Somalia (Oeppen, 2016).

In the face of formidable push factors in source countries like Afghanistan and Syria, and with difficult conditions for refugees in transit and neighbouring countries such as Pakistan and Lebanon, it is inconceivable that the flow of refugees trying to reach Europe will decline. Therefore, European policymakers will need to make current tools like development assistance more effective but also consider the role of legal and regularized paths to Europe for those seeking asylum. Despite the political challenges, European policymakers need to go beyond the usual policy tools to address the refugee crisis and consider more ambitious solutions, including a possible Europe-wide resettlement programme for refugees.

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